

**Opening Statement**  
**Vice Chairman Mark Green**  
**Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity**

*“The Erosion of Communities and Home Values by Leaking Underground Storage Tanks”*  
*September 12, 2002*

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Today the Subcommittee meets to examine the effects of leaking underground storage tanks on homeowners and communities. In 1980, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that this country was facing a serious problem. Many of the more than 2 million underground storage tanks in the United States were nearing the end of their useful life expectancy and expected to leak in the near future. With over 50% of the United States relying on ground water for their drinking water, the fact that leaking tanks were the leading source of groundwater contamination made finding a solution even more critical. In 1984, Congress established a leak prevention, detection, and correction action program to address this nationwide problem of leaking storage tanks; and in 1986 Congress created the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Trust Fund to help states cover the cost of cleanup.

Much progress has been made in the clean-up efforts. EPA estimates that since the federal underground storage tank program began, 1.5 million of the roughly 2.2 million petroleum tanks under the program have been closed. As of September 30, 2001, 419,000 releases had been identified, more than 279,000 cleanups had been initiated, and nearly 269,000 cleanups had been completed with 150,000 sites awaiting cleanup.

Despite this progress, several issues have emerged. With the implementation of the 1998 regulation, the work load for states has increased significantly. States and localities are looking to the federal government to provide additional resources to assist them in the cleanup and cost. The discovery of the chemical MTBE at several of the LUST sites and its detection in drinking water supplies has further complicated cleanup efforts and added to the initial cost of the original program. Finally, many of the affected communities are looking to the federal government to help them deal with the effects that leaking underground storage tanks have on public health and home values in their community.

While there is a program in place to assist with the cleanup of these contaminated sites, the federal government has no program in place to assist the innocent homeowners affected by these leaking underground storage tanks. Many of these communities will likely face the evaporation of home equity, a lack of buyers for contaminated property, and a scarcity of financial institutions willing to make loans in contaminated areas. We all remember the well-publicized relocation actions in Love Canal, New York and Times Beach, Missouri which were taken under special Federal order or through the Superfund program. Because Superfund

specifically excludes petroleum pollution, the residents in the communities affected by these underground storage tanks have little recourse.

At today's hearing we will begin to examine this problem. It is important that we determine what affect this has had on home values. In addition, just how many communities have been affected, and what is the best way to go about assisting innocent homeowners whose lives have been devastated by these leaking underground storage tanks.